

Sūrahs 113 and 114

Al-Falaq and Al-Nās

(The Rising Day and Mankind)

(Makkan Period)

Title

Although the two *Sūrahs*: *al-Falaq* and *al-Nās* are separate and are listed in the Qur'ān independently of each other, the two have so much in common in their linkages and subject matter that they are designated under a single title as well – *mu'awwidhatayn* (the two *Sūrahs* in which Allah's protection is sought). In his *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah*, Bayhaqī states that these were revealed simultaneously, and hence their common, single title. This Introduction covers both *Sūrahs* in view of their identical context and subject matter. Their verses are, however, explained separately and independently.

Period of Revelation

In the opinion of Ḥasan Baṣrī, 'Ikrimah, 'Atā' and Jābir ibn Zayd both *Sūrahs* are Makkan. A report attributes the same opinion to 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās. However, his other report speaks of it as a Madīnan *Sūrah*. The latter viewpoint is endorsed by 'Abd Allāh ibn Zubāyr and Qatādah. This is reinforced by the following

Hadīth related by 'Uqbah ibn 'Āmir, cited by Muslim, Tirmidhī, Nasā'ī and Aḥmad: "The Prophet (peace be upon him) told me one day: 'Do you know which verses were sent down to me tonight? These are unprecedented: al-Falaq and al-Nās,'" (Muslim, *Bāb Faḍl al-mu'awwidhatayn*). This serves as evidence for their Madīnan origin in view of the fact that 'Uqbah embraced Islam in Madīnah after the Prophet's migration there. This point is evident from his own statement, recorded by Abū Dāwūd and Nasā'ī. Some other reports related by Ibn Sa'd, Baghawī, Nasafī, Bayhaqī, Ibn Hajar, Badr al-Dīn 'Aynī and 'Abd ibn Ḥumayd also substantiate the above viewpoint. According to these reports, when the Jews in Madīnah had cast magic on the Prophet (peace be upon him), which made him fall sick, these two *Sūrahs* were revealed. On Wāqidī's authority, Ibn Sa'd relates that this incident happened in 7 H. Accordingly, Sufyān ibn 'Uyaynah too, regards these as Madīnan, (Bukhārī, *Bāb al-Sihr*).

However, as explained in the Introduction to *Sūrah al-Ikhlās*, a report about when a particular *Sūrah* or verse was revealed does not necessarily refer to its date of revelation. Frequently, an already revealed *Sūrah* or verse relevant to a particular situation was later brought into focus by Allah so as to draw the Prophet's attention to these. The divergent reports about these two *Sūrahs* reflect the same. It is fairly evident from their contents that they must have been revealed in the early Makkan period against the storm of opposition raised by the unbelievers. When similar opposition was mounted by hypocrites, Jews and polytheists in Madīnah, the Prophet (peace be upon him) was exhorted by Allah to recite these two *Sūrahs*. This point comes out from 'Uqbah's report quoted above. Likewise, when magic was cast against him and he fell seriously ill, Gabriel, by Allah's leave, visited the Prophet (peace be upon him), directing him to recite these two *Sūrahs*. In sum, those Qur'ānic scholars are on firmer grounds who take it as Makkan. That these were revealed only in the context of others' magic spell is negated by the fact that only a single verse in *Sūrah al-Falaq* refers to "the women who blow on knots" while all of its other verses and the whole of *Sūrah al-Nās* have no link with the magic directed against the Prophet (peace be upon him).

Subject Matter and Themes

These two *Sūrahs* were sent down in Makkah against the backdrop of the staunch opposition to the Prophet's call. As his message spread, the unbelievers' enmity and hostility increased in degree. As long as they had a hope that they would be able to persuade or coax the Prophet (peace be upon him), their hostility did not come out in the open. However, when the Prophet (peace be upon him) made it absolutely clear to them that he would not budge an inch in matters of faith, as is categorically declared in *Sūrah al-Kāfirūn*, their opposition turned into rage. As already noted, *Sūrah al-Kāfirūn* proclaims:

Say: "O Unbelievers! I do not worship those that you worship. Neither do you worship Him Whom I worship. Nor will I worship those whom you have worshipped. Nor are you going to worship Him Whom I worship. To you is your religion, and to me, my religion."

(*al-Kāfirūn* 109: 1-6)

Among the unbelieving Makkans, the most ferocious enemies of the Prophet (peace be upon him) were those who had close family members that had embraced Islam. They were the ones who cursed him publicly. Conspiracies were also hatched to assassinate him in the darkness of the night so that the Banū Hāshim could not avenge his killing. Magical spells were directed at him, seeking his death, lunacy or serious illness. The devils from among men and *jinn* had taken strategic positions in order to sow doubts among people against his own person, his mission and the Qur'ān. In every respect, they exerted themselves in trying to keep people away from the Prophet (peace be upon him). Some had even turned themselves into the Prophet's bitter enemies out of jealousy alone. For them, it was intolerable for anyone other than they themselves or a member of their tribe to rise to such fame. The most glaring example of such behaviour is Abū Jahl. In his own words, the grounds to his opposition of the Prophet (peace be upon him) were:

We and 'Abd Manāf (the Prophet's family) were competitors. They fed people. So did we. Like them, we too provided transport to people. Again, like them we gave donations. We were peers in glory until they claimed that they had one from among them who is a Messenger and who receives revelation from on high. How can we beat them in this domain? By God, we will never believe in him. Nor will we ever testify to him. (Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah* I, 337-338.)

It was against this backdrop that these two *Sūrahs* were revealed:

Say: "I seek refuge with the Lord of the rising day; from the evil of all that He created; from the evil of night's darkness when it spreads around; from the evil of the women who blow on knots; and from the evil of the envier when he envies."

(*al-Falaq* 113: 1-5)

Say: "I seek refuge with the Lord of mankind; ... from the mischief of the whispering, elusive prompter who returns again and again, who whispers in the hearts of people; whether he be from the *jinn* or humans."

(*al-Nās* 114: 1-6)

The Prophet's condition at that time bore close similarity to that of the Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) when Pharaoh had threatened him in his court:

Moses said: "I have taken refuge with my Lord and your Lord from everyone who waxes arrogant and does not believe in the Day of Judgement."

(*al-Mu'min* 40: 27)

"I have taken refuge with my Lord and your Lord lest you should attack me with stones."

(*al-Dukhān* 44: 20)

In both cases, these two outstanding Messengers of Allah faced utter resourcelessness, though they were pitted against mighty and resourceful enemies. Both of them, however, took on their enemies and held fast to their mission. Although they lacked the material resources to counter their enemies, still they were not cowed down by their enemies' threats, warnings, stratagems and hostile moves. Instead, they firmly spoke about how they had taken refuge with the Lord of the universe. Such undoubting resolve can only be displayed by him who unflinchingly believes that his Lord is the mightiest, and that all worldly powers pale into insignificance before Him. Both hold on to the conviction that no harm could befall them as long as they were under their Lord's protection. Therefore, they did not deviate in the slightest from their call to truth, dismissing all threats and warnings hurled their way. Their refuge with their Lord had infused into them indomitable courage and steadfastness.

The issue of these two Sūrahs being part of the Qur'ān

In view of some other issues about these two *Sūrahs*, which appear in works on *tafsīr* and *Ḥadīth*, let us address these with a view to clearing doubts. The first issue concerns whether these *Sūrahs* are definitely part of the Qur'ān or not. Such speculation arose in the light of several reports on the authority of the distinguished Companion Ibn Mas'ūd. In this respect, reports indicate that he did not include these in his copy of the Qur'ān. The reports are related by Imām Aḥmad, Bazzār, Ṭabarānī, Ibn Marduwayh, Abū Ya'lā, 'Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Ḥumaydī, Abū Nu'aym and Ibn Hibbān, with a sound chain of narrators. According to these reports, not only did Ibn Mas'ūd exclude these from the Qur'ān, he also urged others not to mix something with the Qur'ān that did not belong to it. For him, the Prophet (peace be upon him) was directed by Allah to seek His protection with certain words, which are now regarded as *Sūrahs*. Some reports contain the additional note that he did not recite these verses in the Prayers.

On the basis of these reports, the enemies of Islam allege that even the Qur'ān is not free from tampering. They contend that since two of its *Sūrahs* are dubious according to a leading Companion, it

may have undergone some other alterations as well. To refute this charge, Qāḍī Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī and Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ point out that whilst Ibn Mas'ūd was opposed to their inclusion in the Qur'ān, he nonetheless had no reservations about their recitation. Indeed, Ibn Mas'ūd held strictly to the view that only what was approved by the Prophet (peace be upon him) should be included in the Qur'ān. However, he was ignorant of the Prophet's approval on this count. This is not, therefore, a very sound defence. Authentic reports do state that Ibn Mas'ūd refused to take these as Qur'ānic *Sūrahs*. However, some scholars, for example, Imām Nawawī, Imām Ibn Ḥazm and Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī dismiss such reports altogether. However, an academic issue cannot be resolved simply by denying it.

Let us examine in detail Ibn Mas'ūd's stance and its refutation:

- i. In his *Musnad*, Bazzār cites Ibn Mas'ūd's viewpoint, with the remark that it is his lone voice on this issue, not supported by any other Companion's statement.
- ii. The third rightly-guided Caliph, 'Uthmān, had an authentic copy of the Qur'ān edited, which, was endorsed by all the Companions. These official copies were sent to various centres of the Muslim world. This copy does contain both of these *Sūrahs*.
- iii. Since the Prophet's death, to this day, the Muslim world has unanimously recognized the only copies of the Qur'ān in which these *Sūrahs* are included. Notwithstanding Ibn Mas'ūd's credentials, his opinion alone is no match to the centuries-old consensus of the Muslim community.
- iv. Authentic *Aḥādīth* state that the Prophet (peace be upon him) himself recited these *Sūrahs* in the Prayer, exhorted Muslims to do the same and taught these to them as part of the Qur'ān, as is borne out by the following *Aḥādīth*: 'Uqbah ibn 'Āmir, (as we have already noted earlier), related that regarding *Sūrahs al-Falaq* and *al-Nās*, the Prophet (peace be upon him) told him that these had been revealed to him on that night, (Muslim, Aḥmad, Tirmidhī and Nasā'ī). Nasā'ī cites another report by 'Uqbah ibn 'Āmir: "The Prophet (peace be upon him) recited both of these

Sūrahs in *Fajr* Prayer." Ibn Ḥibbān quotes him saying: "The Prophet (peace be upon him) told me: 'As long as it is possible, these *Sūrahs* should be recited in your Prayers,'" (Nasā'ī, *Bāb Fadl al-mu'awwidhatayn*). Sa'īd ibn Mansūr recorded Mu'ādh ibn Jabal's report that the Prophet (peace be upon him) recited both of these in the *Fajr* Prayer. In his *Musnad*, Imām Aḥmad cites this authentic report on the authority of another Companion that the Prophet (peace be upon him) told him: "When you offer Prayer, recite these two *Sūrahs*." 'Uqbah ibn 'Āmir relates: "The Prophet (peace be upon him) told me: 'Should I teach you those best *Sūrahs* which people recite in Prayers?' When he expressed his ardent desire to learn the same, the Prophet (peace be upon him) taught him *Sūrahs al-Falaq* and *al-Nās*. When it was time for Prayer, the Prophet (peace be upon him) recited the same two *Sūrahs*. After finishing Prayer, when he passed by me, he asked: 'O 'Uqbah! How did you find these?' The Prophet (peace be upon him) then directed him also to recite the two *Sūrahs* when going to bed and on getting up," (Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd and Nasā'ī). Another report on 'Uqbah's authority reads as follows: "The Prophet (peace be upon him) advised me to recite *Sūrahs al-Ikhlāṣ*, *al-Falaq* and *al-Nās* after every Prayer," (Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd, Tirmidhī and Nasā'ī). 'Uqbah also relates that: "Once while the Prophet (peace be upon him) was riding, and I was walking along with him putting my hands on his feet, I requested him to teach me *Sūrah Hūd* or *Sūrah Yūsuf*. He told me that in the eyes of Allah, *Sūrah al-Falaq* is the most beneficial *Sūrah* for His servants," (Nasā'ī, Ibn Marduwayh and Ḥākim). 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Ābis al-Juhanī narrated the following report: "The Prophet (peace be upon him) told me: 'Ibn 'Ābis! Should I tell you which is the best Prayer for seeking Allah's refuge?' When I replied in the affirmative, he told me: 'The two *Sūrahs al-Falaq* and *al-Nās*,'" (Nasā'ī, Bayhaqī, Baghawī and Ibn Sa'd). Umm Salamah reports: "Of the *Sūrahs* liked most by Allah are *Sūrahs al-Falaq* and *al-Nās*" (Ibn Marduwayh).

One is faced with the question as to how and why Ibn Mas'ūd entertained this misconception. The answer lies in studying together the following two reports. One of these reads thus:

"Ibn Mas'ūd held that it was a command given to the Prophet (peace be upon him) to seek Allah's refuge in this particular way." The other report is on the authority of the distinguished Qur'ānic scholar and Companion, Ubayy ibn Ka'b: "Zirr ibn Ḥubaysh says: 'O Ubayy, your brother in faith Ibn Mas'ūd holds this view. What is your opinion?' He replied: 'I had also made a query regarding these *Sūrah*s. The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied: 'I was asked to say *qul*, which I repeated.' So we also recite the same as what the Prophet (peace be upon him) recited." (This report features, with slight textual variants, in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Imām Aḥmad's *Musnad*, Abū Bakr al-Ḥumaydī's *Musnad*, Abū Nu'aym's *al-Mustakhraj* and Nasā'ī's *Sunan*.) Aḥmad's version contains the following wording: "Ubayy said: 'I testify that the Prophet (peace be upon him) told me that Gabriel had asked him to recite *qul a'ūdhu bi rabbī al-falaq* and he did the same. Likewise, Gabriel had asked him to recite *qul a'ūdhu bi rabbī al-nās* and he did the same. So we also recite these in the same way as the Prophet (peace be upon him) did.'" On studying these two reports, it emerges that Ibn Mas'ūd might have mistaken the use of the opening word of *qul* in both *Sūrah*s, thinking that the Prophet (peace be upon him) had been commanded to seek Allah's refuge thus. However, he did not clarify this point with the Prophet (peace be upon him). Ubayy too, had the same query which he discussed with the Prophet (peace be upon him). The Prophet (peace be upon him) duly told him that he had said *qul* in imitation of Gabriel. Let us illustrate this point further. If one is commanded thus: "Say, I seek refuge". In compliance with this, that person is most likely to omit the word "say", and pronounce only this much: "I seek refuge". However, if one is asked to convey this command to others: "Say, I seek refuge," he is not authorized to drop any part of the above. Rather, he is obliged to convey faithfully the directive given to him. That both of these *Sūrah*s open with *qul* (say) underscores these being part of divine revelation. The Prophet (peace be upon him) was obliged to transmit accurately what he had received. The Qur'ān was not a command directed only at him. Besides these two *Sūrah*s, as many as 330 Qur'ānic verses open with *qul*, pointing to their origin as divine revelation. The Prophet (peace be upon him) conveyed these

faithfully to everyone. Had *qul* been a command specific to him, he would have dropped it in all instances, and the same would not have formed part of the Qur'ān. Rather, the Prophet (peace be upon him) would have relayed only the relevant command.

On reflection, one realizes that it is improper to regard the Companions as infallible or to charge one who points to any of their aspects with showing disrespect. In this particular instance, such an eminent Companion as Ibn Mas'ūd committed a serious mistake. Other Companions were liable to make lapses. We should objectively study these scholarly issues and identify any lapse if committed by a Companion. However, it would be a great injustice to reproach any Companion, rather than only point out their lapse. The Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* scholars have, no doubt, refuted Ibn Mas'ūd's misperception about these two *Sūrahs*. However, no one ever dared accuse him of going beyond the fold of Islam for not considering these two *Sūrahs* as part of the Qur'ān.

The Prophet being under a magical spell

Another issue arising from these two *Sūrahs* is the magical spell cast on the Prophet (peace be upon him) and as result of which he had fallen ill. Gabriel called on him to advise that he should recite these two *Sūrahs* in order to ward off the effect of such magic. Many pseudo-rationalists, both past and present, however, have given a new twist to this incident, contending that if these reports are accepted, it renders the entire *Sharī'ah* dubious. For, had the Prophet (peace be upon him) been susceptible to magic, as these reports state, it is not certain what he said under the influences of such spells and what constitutes genuine revelation. They go even a step further in alleging that the Prophet (peace be upon him) may have paraded himself as the Messenger of Allah under the spell of magic and that he may have misconstrued someone for the Archangel Gabriel. For them, the *Aḥādīth* recounting this incident, are discordant with the Qur'ān. For, the Qur'ān mentions magic in relation to the Prophet (peace be upon him), as a wild charge hurled by unbelievers: "The wrong-doers say: 'You are only following one [the Prophet (peace be upon him)] who is bewitched.'" (*Banī Isrā'īl* 17: 47)

So as to study the issue let us first ascertain the authenticity of these reports. We should also consider the nature and range of the effect of magic upon the Prophet (peace be upon him). In the light of these facts, we should then take up the objections raised on this count.

It goes to the credit of early Muslims that they were men of such integrity that they did not twist or suppress historical facts in order to promote only what was dear to their hearts. On the contrary, they transmitted an account of all that happened. They were not alarmed by the apprehension that their reports might be abused or blown out of proportion by those hostile to Islam. If an incident is on record, it does not befit a scholar of integrity to refute certain reports, apprehending that it will give rise to mischief. Nor is it tenable to take recourse to overstretched speculations in relation to history. Historical facts should be accepted at their face value and inferences from these should be made later.

As to the authenticity of this incident, it is firmly on record. It is simply irrefutable. For Bukhārī, Muslim, Nasā'ī, Ibn Mājah, Aḥmad, 'Abd al-Razzāq, Ḥumaydī, Bayhaqī, Ṭabarānī, Ibn Sa'd, Ibn Marduwayh, Ibn Abī Shaybah, Ḥākim, 'Abd ibn Ḥumayd and other *Hadīth* scholars have recorded consistent and many reports on the authority of such outstanding Companions as 'Ā'ishah, Zayd ibn Arqam and Ibn 'Abbās. (Bukhārī, *Kitāb Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*). These reports are related by a long chain of narrators. Although each of these reports is *khābar wāḥid*, on collating these the following details of the incident emerge.

After the Ḥudaibiyah Treaty, when the Prophet (peace be upon him) returned to Madīnah, in Muḥarram 7 H, a Jewish delegation from Khaybar arrived in Madīnah and contacted Labīd ibn A'sam, a member of the Banū Zurayq tribe, notorious for his skills in magic.¹ (Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Khalq*).

They apprised him of their relations with the Prophet (peace be upon him), and of their failed attempts to cast magical spells

1 Some speak of him as a Jew, others as a hypocrite or an ally of the Jews. All, however, agree that he was a member of the Banū Zurayq tribe. This was not some Jewish tribe, however, but one of the Banū Khazraj tribes, i.e. the Anṣār. He is taken as a Jew for being their ally. Those who refer to him as a hypocrite do so in view of his outward appearance as a Muslim.

upon him. They approached him in the hope that he, being an accomplished magician, would be successful where they had failed. They offered him gold coins as his remuneration for harming the Prophet (peace be upon him). At that time the Prophet (peace be upon him) had a Jewish page boy. They lured him into getting a piece of the Prophet's comb which still had some of his hair. A magical spell was cast on the comb and his hair. Some reports indicate that Labīd had cast this spell while others impute this act to his sisters who were also adept. Be that as it may, the spell was placed in the spathe of a male date-tree and hidden beneath a stone at the bottom of a well belonging to Banū Zurayq, called Dharwān or Dhī Arwān.² It took one year for this spell to take effect. In the later half of the year, the Prophet (peace be upon him) felt some of its effect, and in the last six weeks its stronger effects and in the last three days, he was almost under its sway. However, its only effect was that he felt he was melting away from within. He thought he had done something whereas he had not. Likewise, he had the impression that he had visited his wives while he had not. At times, his vision was slightly blurred. In sum, all these effects were restricted to his body. Others had no clue as to what was going on. It did not affect his functioning as Allah's Messenger at all. For no report of that period states that he ever forgot or mixed up a Qur'ānic verse or revised drastically any of his teachings as part of his sermons and public sessions.

He never passed off any material as divine revelation which was not so. Nor did he ever miss or forget any Prayer. Had he committed any such mistake, there would have been public outrage. Everyone would then have realized that the Prophet (peace be upon him) who had all along been invincible, had fallen prey to magic. This incident had no bearing upon his carrying out his duty as Allah's Messenger. Only in his personal life did he feel, at times, its effect. One day while he was with 'Ā'ishah, he repeatedly invoked Allah's help. In the meantime he fell asleep. On getting up, he told 'Ā'ishah: "What I enquired about of my Lord,

2. Initially, dates are inside a spathe. The complexion of the spathe of a male-date is similar to that of human beings. Moreover, it exudes a smell that is like that of human semen.

He has informed me." When she probed him, he elaborated: "Two angels visited me in human form. They stood near my bed. One of them asked: "What happened to him?" The other one replied: "He is under a magical spell." On being asked as to who had cast it, it was clarified that Labīd ibn A'sam had executed it. On being further quizzed how it was done, it was pointed out that the spell had been cast at the Prophet's comb and within the spathe of a male date-tree. On being asked about its location, it was stated that it had been hidden under a stone in a well. On being asked what to do next, it was suggested that the well be emptied of its water and the magic be taken out, (Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Ṭibb*). It was then that the Prophet (peace be upon him) directed 'Alī, 'Ammār ibn Yāsir and Zubayr to do this job. They were accompanied by two members of the Banū Zurayq tribe – Jubayr ibn Iyās al-Zurqī and Qays ibn Miḥṣan al-Zurqī. A little later, the Prophet (peace be upon him) also reached the spot, along with some Companions. As water was drawn, a pouch was recovered. Inside it were the Prophet's comb, his hair, and eleven knots on a band and a wax image with needles pricked into it. Gabriel visited the Prophet (peace be upon him) and directed him to recite *Sūrahs al-Falaq* and *al-Nās*. As he recited each verse, those knots were loosened and needles were drawn from the image. When he finished reciting both *Sūrahs*, all the knots and needles had been removed. Instantly, the Prophet (peace be upon him) felt light and relieved, free from that magical spell. He interrogated Labīd who confessed his crime yet the Prophet (peace be upon him) let him go. Never did he avenge any hurt caused to him personally. Moreover, he forbade those present from divulging it, saying that since Allah had cured him, it was beneath him to discuss it any further. It would only enrage Muslims against the perpetrators of this crime.

These details of the incident clearly indicate that this magic did not have any bearing on the Prophet's working as Allah's Messenger. In his personal capacity he was as vulnerable as any other human being. For example, he was injured in the Battle of Uhud. On another occasion, he fell off his horse and sustained injuries. Moreover, *Aḥādīth* inform us that he was once stung by a scorpion. These incidents were not discordant with his status as the

Messenger of Allah. Going by the same logic, he could fall under a magical spell. A Prophet may be affected by magic, as is borne out by the Qur'ān itself. Take the following passages as illustrative:

The (magicians) enchanted the eyes of the people and struck then with awe, and produced a mighty sorcery.

(al-A'rāf 7: 116)

Moses said (to the magicians): "Let it be you to throw first." Then suddenly it appeared to Moses, owing to their magic, as if their ropes and staffs were running. So Moses's heart was filled with fear. We said to him: "Have no fear, for it is you who will prevail. And throw down what is in your right hand."

(Tā Hā 20: 66-69).

As to the argument that this incident substantiates the unbelieving Makkans' charge that the Prophet (peace be upon him) was an enchanted person let us realize that they did not consider him as sick, under the influence of magic. Rather, they thought that some magician had driven him crazy. Out of the same craze, God forbid, they continued that he claimed to be a Messenger and related fanciful accounts of Paradise and Hell. The fact of the matter is that the magic had only affected his body while his role as Messenger remained intact, safe from magic's harm.

Another relevant point in this context is that those who dismiss magic as something unreal do so because there is no scientific basis for magic. However, there are many things around us that cannot be explained away scientifically. Our inability to comprehend something does not justify our denial of its existence. Magic is essentially a psychological effect which may affect the human mind and the body. For example, fear, a psychological state, makes the hair rise and the body shake. Magic cannot and does not transform anything. However, under its sway, man's sense perception changes, convincing him that something has changed. The ropes and staffs thrown by magicians towards the Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) had not changed into running serpents. However, the

enchanted eyes of the thousands-strong crowd perceived them as serpents. Even Moses's heart was filled with fear at this spectacle. Verse 102 of *al-Baqarah* presents the account of Hārūt and Mārūt in Babylon, from whom people learnt such magical words as caused separation between a man and his wife. This too, only occurred on the psychological plane. People turned more and more to these angels as they found their words effective. Like any other thing in the universe, say a bullet or a bomb, magic cannot and does not have any effect without Allah's leave. However, since magic has been in existence for thousands of years, its outright dismissal betrays only stubbornness.

The Islamic view on charms and amulets

The position and effectiveness of charms and amulets in Islam may also be discussed in the light of these two *Sūrah*s. This point assumes greater significance in view of several *Aḥādīth* stating that the Prophet (peace be upon him) used to recite these two *Sūrah*s every night while going to bed and during his illness. Some reports refer to his recitation of *Sūrah al-Ikhlāṣ* in addition to these two *Sūrah*s. It is stated that he recited these thrice, blew on his hands and gently massaged his body, from head to toe. During his terminal illness when he was unable to do so, 'Ā'ishah on her own or at the Prophet's behest recited these *Sūrah*s, whilst he pressed his body with his blessed hands. These reports with authentic chains and on the authority of 'Ā'ishah feature in the *Ḥadīth* collections of Bukhārī, Muslim, Nasā'ī, Ibn Mājah, Abū Dāwūd and Mālik. Needless to add, 'Ā'ishah was thoroughly familiar with the Prophet's daily routines. (Bukhārī, *Kitāb Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*.)

Let us first study the *Sharī'ah* stance on this issue. In a long report narrated by 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās, one comes across these words: "The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Such members of my community will enter Paradise without any interrogation, who do not resort to branding, charms, amulets and omens. Rather, they repose trust in their Lord," (Muslim, *Kitāb al-Ajinnah*). Mughīrah ibn Shu'bah relates: "The Prophet (peace be upon him) remarked: 'One who seeks curing by branding or turning to charms and

amulets betrays his indifference to trust in Allah,'" (Tirmidhī, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*). 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd reports: "The Prophet (peace be upon him) disapproved ten things; out of which resorting to charms and amulets is one. However, *Sūrahs al-Falaq, al-Nās* and *al-Ikhlāṣ* are an exception," (Abū Dāwūd, Aḥmad, Nasā'ī, Ibn Ḥibbān and Ḥākim). Some *Aḥādīth* indicate that in the early years of his mission, the Prophet (peace be upon him) had strictly forbidden charms and amulets. Later, he gave provisional permission, subject to the condition that these should not involve polytheism and consist of Allah's excellent names or Qur'ānic text, and be comprehensible so that anything sinful in them might be easily detected. Moreover, no-one should hold on to the view that charms and amulets alone can cure one. Rather, one must repose one's trust in Allah, believing that He may make these beneficial. Let us, then, now study some relevant *Aḥādīth*.

In his *Ṣaghīr*, Ṭabarānī has cited this report on the authority of 'Alī: "Once while the Prophet (peace be upon him) was offering Prayer, a scorpion stung him. When he finished Prayer, he said: 'Curse be on the scorpion. It does not spare anyone, including one in Prayer.' He then asked for water and salt and splashed the salted water on the bite. While doing so, he kept reciting *Sūrahs al-Kāfirūn, al-Ikhlāṣ, al-Falaq* and *al-Nās*." Ibn 'Abbās's report is as follows: "The Prophet (peace be upon him) used to recite this supplication for Ḥasan and Ḥusayn: 'I give you in the refuge of the unblemished words of Allah against every Satan, evil-doer and jealous eye,'" (Bukhārī, Aḥmad, Tirmidhī and Ibn Mājah).

Regarding 'Uthmān ibn al-'Āṣ, this report, with its variants, features in the *Ḥadīth* collections of Muslim, Mālik, Ṭabarānī and Ḥākim: "He complained to the Prophet (peace be upon him) that ever since his acceptance of Islam he had felt a severe pain. The Prophet (peace be upon him) directed him to place his right hand at the spot, to recite *basmalah* thrice and to press the spot with his hand seven times while saying: 'I seek refuge with Allah and His power against the evil of all that I feel and which I apprehend,'" (Muslim, *Bāb al-Salām*). Mālik's version contains this additional note: "'Uthmān said that after reciting this supplication, he was cured of this pain and that he instructed his family members about

the same. Ṭalq ibn 'Alī informs that he was bitten by a scorpion in the Prophet's presence. The latter recited something, blew it on him and pressed his hand on that spot, (Aḥmad and Ṭahāwī). Abū Sa'īd Khudrī relates: "Once when the Prophet (peace be upon him) fell ill, Gabriel called on him and asked: 'O Muḥammad! Have you fallen ill?' When he replied in the affirmative, he said: 'I use the incantation on you in the name of Allah against all that hurts you and against the evil eye of every jealous person. May Allah cure you. I use the incantation on you in His name,' (Muslim). Almost an identical report on the authority of 'Ubādah ibn Ṣāmit appears in *Musnad Aḥmad*: "While the Prophet (peace be upon him) was ill, I called on him and found him in great pain. In the evening, however, when I visited him again, I found him hale and hearty. I asked him as to how he had such a speedy recovery. He replied: 'Gabriel called on me and used some incantation on me.' He then recounted to him Gabriel's incantation, similar to the above quoted one. Identical reports on the authority of 'Ā'ishah are cited by Muslim and Aḥmad.

There is yet another report related by the Prophet's wife Ḥafṣah and cited by Aḥmad in his *Musnad*: "One day the Prophet (peace be upon him) visited me while a lady, Shifā', was in my house.³ She was adept at using incantations for curing people of blisters. The Prophet (peace be upon him) asked her to instruct me in the same." Shifā' herself has narrated this: "The Prophet (peace be upon him) told me that as I had instructed Ḥafṣah in reading and writing, I should teach her the incantation for curing people of blisters," (Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd and Nasā'ī). Muslim has cited 'Awf ibn Mālik's report: "In the *Jāhilīyah* period we were accustomed to incantations. We sought the Prophet's ruling on this issue. He asked us to identify what we used such incantations for. He added that there is nothing wrong in it as long as it is not vitiated by polytheism," (Muslim). Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh reports: "The Prophet (peace be upon him) prohibited the use of incantations. Later,

3. Her name was Laylah, though she was popularly known as Shifā' bint 'Abd Allāh. She embraced Islam before the Prophet's migration to Madīnah. She was a member of the Banū 'Adī family of the Quraysh. 'Umar belongs to the same family. She was thus a relative of Ḥafṣah.

family members of 'Amr ibn Ḥazm called on us and informed us of the incantation they used on the victims of snake or scorpion bites. However, the Prophet (peace be upon him) had forbidden it. Then they recounted the formulae of their incantation. Upon hearing it the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'I do not find anything wrong in it. If any of you can help his brother, you must do so,'" (Muslim, Aḥmad and Ibn Mājah). His other report on this issue is as follows: "The people of Ḥazm knew the incantation for relieving the victims of snake bite. The Prophet (peace be upon him) allowed them to use it," (Muslim). This is also supported by 'Ā'ishah's following report: "The Prophet (peace be upon him) allowed a family of the Anṣār to use incantations for poisonous bites," (Muslim, Aḥmad and Ibn Mājah). 'Āṣ has also related some reports referring to the Prophet's permission for using incantations for poisonous bites, blisters and the evil eye, (Aḥmad, Tirmidhī, Muslim and Ibn Mājah).

'Umayr *Mawlā* of Abū al-Laḥm reports: "In the *Jāhiliyyah* period I possessed an incantation. I recounted the same to the Prophet (peace be upon him) who directed me to delete certain things from it and to use it henceforth," (Aḥmad, Tirmidhī, Ibn Mājah, and Ḥākim). Once, when Abū Bakr called on his daughter, 'Ā'ishah, he found her ill and a Jewish woman was using an incantation on her. He told her to use the Book of Allah, (*Mālik, Muwaṭṭa', Kitāb al-Jāmi'*). One thus learns that if the People of the Book employ verses from the Torah or the Gospels in their incantations, these are also lawful.

As to the question about whether charms and amulets are effective or not, let us bear in mind that the Prophet (peace be upon him) did not discourage Muslims from using medicines. Rather, he asserted that Allah has provided a cure for every disease. Accordingly, he advised people to use medicine and to seek cures. He himself suggested some medicines to some people, of which the details appear in the *Kitāb al-Ṭibb* of *Ḥadīth* collections. However, it is by Allah's leave that medicine helps cure men. Had medicines always been effective, no one would have died in a hospital with the provision of requisite medicines. If supplications, Qur'ān recitation and invocation to Allah's excellent names are made in addition to medication, there is nothing wrong with this or one

may resort to these at a place where medical facilities are non-existent. Only pseudo-rationalists brand it as irrational.⁴ What is certainly not correct is to abandon medication and to rely solely on incantations. Equally reprehensible is for anyone to abuse incantations, charms and amulets for earning money.

In this context reference is made to the following report by Abū Sa'īd Khudrī, cited by Bukhārī, Muslim, Tirmidhī, Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd and Ibn Mājah. It is also reinforced by Ibn 'Abbās's report quoted by Bukhārī. Abū Sa'īd Khudrī's report is as follows: "The Prophet (peace be upon him) had sent a team of his Companions on an expedition, including Khudrī. On the way they stayed in a town of an Arabian tribe and asked them to offer some hospitality which they refused. In the meantime, the tribal chief was bitten by a scorpion. Then they approached the Companions, asking whether they had any medicine or charm to cure him. Khudrī told them that they did have a cure for it. However, in view of their rudeness they should pay for it. They promised to give a flock of 30 goats for the same. Khudrī recited *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah* and applied his saliva on the bite.⁵ He was cured and they gave goats. However, the Companions decided not to draw upon these goats unless they had secured the Prophet's ruling. They were not sure whether it was lawful to have some gain in return for such healing. They called on him and related the incident. He laughed and asked: "How did you know that this *Sūrah* can serve as a charm. Take those goats and give me my share as well."

4. Even many materialistic physicians concede that supplications and devotion to Allah are effective in curing patients. I have had twice first-hand experience of the effectiveness of supplications. In 1948 when I was placed under house arrest, a stone blocked my urethra and for 16 hours I could not urinate. I prayed to Allah that I did not want to take the favour of tyrants in seeking medical help. I prayed to Him to cure me. The stone moved away and for twenty years it did not hurt me. In 1968, however, it became painful and was removed surgically. Likewise, when I was arrested for the second time in 1953, I developed severe eczema on my shanks and no medicine seemed to work. Once again I prayed to Allah, as I had done in 1948, and without any medication I got rid of eczema, which never recurred.

5. Most of the reports do not name Abū Sa'īd on this count. These do not state even that he was a member of that expedition team. However, Tirmidhī's report clearly mentions both of the above points.

Before taking the above *Ḥadīth* as the licence for the commercial use of charms, amulets and incantations, we should bring to mind the peculiar conditions of the then Arabia in which this incident took place. Also note that the Prophet (peace be upon him) asked for his share in order to declare the validity of that act. At that time, and even today, there is hardly a place to stay in Arabia for miles upon miles. Inns or hotels were then out of the question. Nor were any shops or service places for travellers. It was therefore customary there that people of every town should host travellers. For, refusal to do so spelled starvation for travellers. That is why denying hospitality was something revolting in the Arabian society. The Prophet (peace be upon him) therefore upheld his Companions' act of making them pay, as they had refused hospitality to them. While placing trust in Allah, a Companion recited *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah* and when it cured the chief, the tribe paid by way of giving goats. The Prophet (peace be upon him) declared this earning as wholesome and lawful.

Bukhārī's version, which is given on Ibn 'Abbās's authority, contains these words from the Prophet (peace be upon him): "Far from doing something else, you did right in reciting the Book of Allah for earning this." His observation underscores the excellence of the Qur'ān over all incantations. Moreover, it pressed home the truth of Islam to that tribe and they realized the blessings of the Qur'ān sent down to the Prophet (peace be upon him). However, this incident does not sanction commercial shops for selling charms and amulets. Taking this as a source of income was unimaginable in the era of the Prophet (peace be upon him), Companions, Successors and the righteous people of the past.

Affinity between these two Sūrahs and Sūrah al-Fātiḥah

Another salient point about these *Sūrahs* is the affinity between them – being the concluding part of the Qur'ān – and *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah* – the opening part of the Qur'ān. Although the Qur'ān was not collected in the chronological order yet the Prophet (peace be upon him) compiled it in accordance with Allah's directive. As a result, the verses and *Sūrahs* revealed over a period of twenty-three years in response to varied situations and contexts are arranged

AL-FALAQ AND AL-NĀS (The Rising Day and Mankind)

in a particular order. The Qur'ān opens with *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah* and concludes with these two *Sūrahs*. In the opening *Sūrah*, a servant of Allah praises and glorifies Allah – the Lord of the universe, Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate and the Master of the Day of Recompense. He affirms that he worships only Him and turns only to Him for help. His greatest need is to be directed to the straight way. For this he is blessed with the entire Qur'ān. The concluding note is that man invokes Allah – the Lord of the rising day, the Lord of mankind, King of mankind and the true God of mankind for His refuge against all mischief and evil of every creature. He seeks Allah's special protection against the promptings of the devils from among both the *jinn* and humans. For it is they who obstruct him most from following the straight way. The perfect affinity between the opening and concluding parts of the Qur'ān cannot be missed by any discerning person.